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POLICE

# Slayings send shiver through gay community

Gazette Telegraph and news services

ASHLAND, Ore. — The killing of a lesbian couple who fought an anti-gay rights measure last year has sent a shiver of fear and pain through their friends in gay and AIDS support groups.

Police discovered the bodies of Roxanne Ellis and Michelle Abdill in the back of their pickup truck Thursday in neighboring Medford, and authorities were investigating whether their deaths were linked to their political activism. The women lived in Colorado Springs until moving to Oregon in 1990.

"The gay community is rightly very concerned right now," said Medford police Sgt. Mike Moran. "But we have no real information pursuing the hate crime angle. We are also considering the possibility this could be a personal vendetta, a business grievance, and the less likely scenario of random crime."

Ellis, 54, and Abdill, 42, were domestic partners as well as partners in a property management business in Medford. In Colorado Springs, Ellis was a former co-owner of the Picnic Basket catering company and Abdill was a nurses assistant.

"The shock and pain comes from the fact that these were very loving, gracious, giving women of faith," said the Rev. Michael Powell, pastor of the First United Methodist Church in Medford, where both women served in the leadership. "We loved them because they were sisters in Christ."

On Monday, Ellis had an appointment to show a duplex apartment. She phoned her daughter, Lorri Ellis, several hours after the appointment to say she was going shopping. Then an hour later, she phoned Abdill and asked her to come to the apartment to help jump-start her pickup because the battery had died.

That evening, Lorri Ellis drove by the apartment to check on the couple and told police she saw her mother's pickup drive away. She tried to flag it down, but the driver eluded her.

On Thursday afternoon, a cable television installer spotted the pickup in the parking lot of an apartment complex across town. He had memorized the license plate when he went home for lunch and watched the news on TV.

In the bed of the pickup, underneath a canopy, police found the bodies of the women.

Both died violently, Moran said. Police withheld further details pending an autopsy.

Police want to question a gray-haired man with wire-rimmed glasses seen at the duplex. Police said they don't consider him a suspect yet.

From the time the women disappeared, people who knew Ellis and Abdill have feared that their gay-rights activism had something to do with it.

Ashland is known as a safe haven for people who are different in a region not otherwise known for its tolerance.

The rest of Jackson County, including Medford, is much more conservative.

Statewide, two ballot measures to limit gay rights were defeated by Oregon voters last year, but the latest won a majority in Jackson County, where the vote was 34,467 to 30,065.

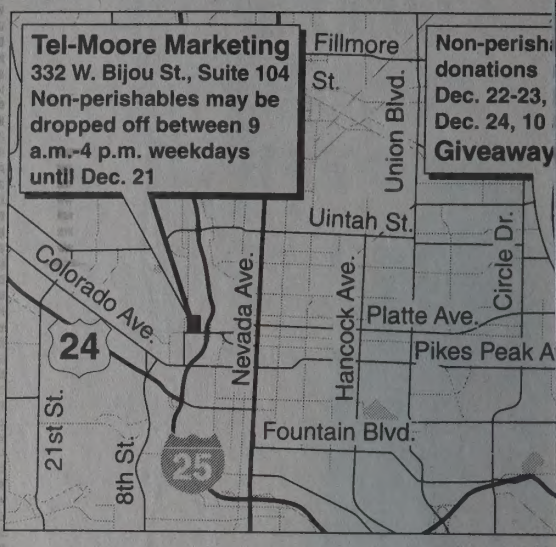
"Some people left the area because of the fear of violence," over the anti-gay rights measure, said Judy McGarvey, who knew Ellis and Abdill from a Medford support group for families and friends of people with AIDS.

But Ellis and Abdill weren't afraid to speak out on television, radio, and in newspapers.

On Friday, friends of the two women gathered at the First United Methodist Church. Representatives from PFLAG vowed to establish a center for gays in Medford, according to the Medford Mail Tribune. A memorial fund to help build that center was established in the women's names.

Medford police, meanwhile, were tight-lipped about a specific cause of death. An autopsy was scheduled for Friday night, but could have been delayed because of a homicide in a neighboring county.

Medford police officials also set up a hotline for people to call with any additional suspect information. That number is (800) 281-5202.




# Christmas Eve giv
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By **Kathryn Sosbe**
Gazette Telegraph

Bob Telmosse is afraid no one will find him on Christmas Eve.

It's not that Telmosse is greedily anticipating a bundle of personal gifts. Just the opposite. He'll spend that day *giving away* food, clothing and gifts to an expected crowd of 9,000 people.

No questions asked.

It's a 12-year-old tradition born out of a prank. It's a strong tradition that faces a slight obstacle this year.

"We always have a few people who call after Christmas because they didn't know it was happening," Telmosse said. "This year, we've got the added worry that because we've moved, somebody won't be able to find us."

Telmosse had to move the giveaway from the former Pay N Pak warehouse on Circle Drive and Unitah Street after it was sold. That business complex is now under renovation by the new owners.

Add to that Telmosse's worry that Christmas Eve falls on a Sunday this year. Most of the businesses where he buys food are closed on weekends, which means he's having a two-day storage problem he's still working to resolve.

Caught in a pinch, Telmosse considered pitching a few tents in an empty field, a proposition that would have dire consequences in the event of bad weather.

Luckily, The Citadel mall management stepped in and offered — for the cost of utilities only — the use of a 24,000-square-foot building on the northeast corner of Chelton Road and Platte Avenue. Although half the size of Telmosse's usual space, he said the event will be just as large.

In years past, people began lining up as early as 6 a.m. for the mid-afternoon giveaway. The larger space allowed enough room for the crowds to wait in warmth, but this year they'll have to wait outside. Telmosse said he hopes to have portable heaters set up to provide some warmth from the cold.

Telmosse always needs help with the giveaway, which started in March 1983 when an anonymous advertisement ran in the Gazette Telegraph. The ad announced there would be free food in the parking lot of the Denver Warehouse, Telmosse's

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